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SUBJECT: WHAT,S ERITREA UP TO IN SUDAN?

REF: KHARTOUM 075

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald K McMullen for reason 1.4 (d)

11. (C) Summary: Finnish MP and former EC Special Envoy for Sudan Pekka Havisto told the ambassador January 18 that Eritrea is working to help fulfill the "Garang Dream" in Sudan, wherein marginalized people in the South, East, and in Darfur cooperate to counterbalance the National Congress Party and the powerful center. Eritrea, according to this view, hopes to establish friendly Sudanese clients in influential positions. Havisto said he met in Asmara with representatives of Darfur's Justice and Equality Movement (JEM), adding that the Eritreans continue to look for ways to influence the course of events in Darfur. End Summary.

12. (C) Eritrea Seeking Another "Outside)In" Upset?

According to Havisto, the Eritrean strategy for Sudan somewhat mirrors the 2009 electoral strategy of GoSS President Salva Kiir (reftel, para 8) "to run against the NCP in alliance with the other marginalized peoples of Sudan." Just as Eritrea won its thirty year war for independence only after EPLF-supported ethnic rebels took Addis Ababa (in the Eritrean perspective), so too would a Sudanese government dominated by the formerly marginalized periphery, indebted to Eritrea for political and other support along the way, guarantee a pro-Eritrea Sudan, according to this view.

13. (C) The PFDJ's "Brain" and "Muscle"

Havisto said he had just met with the People's Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ) Head of Political Affairs Yemane Ghebreab, who he described as the "brains behind this strategy." He said the PFDJ's "muscle" in terms of implementing the strategy was Abdella Jabir, who encumbers the party's blandly titled portfolio, Head of Organization Affairs. NOTE: The Libyan COM here cites Abdella Jabir as his "best Eritrean contact."

14. (C) SPLM, Eastern Front, and now JEM

-- The SPLM's late John Garang sold Isaias on this outside-in approach to Sudan (the "Garang Dream"), Havisto avers, and Eritrea maintains this strategy despite Garang's death. The SPLM has long enjoyed Eritrea's support and is opening an

office in Asmara with a permanent representative.

-- The Eastern Front peace deal has been Eritrea's most significant accomplishment in implementing this strategy, in the opinion of Havisto and others. This month's visit to Asmara by Eastern Front leaders, who were warned against factionalism, reportedly included concerned discussions about the slow pace of the accord's implementation.

-- The GSE seeks to develop a friendly client in Darfur. Havisto said the Eritreans alienated the Darfur rebels invited to Asmara to form the National Redemption Front after the Abuja conference by holding them under virtual house arrest, and are currently trying to rebuild relations with JEM. Havisto met with JEM representatives while in Asmara, and Acting PolOff noted a JEM representative in Codel Payne,s meeting January 5 with Darfuris.

15. (C) Comment: Although one could say that Eritrea owes its very existence as an independent state to the success of this outside-in strategy vis-a-vis the Derg in 1990-91, recent events demonstrate that supposedly "friendly clients" don't always remain so. Nevertheless, Isaias may see this as small Eritrea's best chance for a winning strategy in the region, i.e., friendly and politically indebted neighboring states run by former marginalized people who were helped to power by Eritrea. Eritrean assistance for the SPLM may be one thing, but some here may not comprehend that assistance to others (radical Somali Islamists, etc.) is, for the USG, something quite different-and unacceptable. Post has repeatedly made this point with GSE and other interlocutors and will continue to do so. End Comment.

MCMULLEN